

MILK RIVER

WATERSHED NEWS

Construction Begins on New Bridge Across the St. Mary River

Paul Azevedo - St. Mary Rehabilitation State Project Coordinator

On July 18, Senator Max Baucus, Lt. Governor John Bohlinger, dignitaries from the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, and representatives of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group participated in a ground breaking ceremony for a new bridge across the St. Mary River on the Blackfeet Reservation. The current bridge was built in 1915 by the Minneapolis Bridge Company to carry the twin barrels of the St. Mary Siphon and a county road across the St. Mary River. In addition to not meeting current height, width, and load standards, the most recent National Bridge Inventory Rating survey found the bridge was structurally deficient and unable to safely meet the demands placed on it today.

From a planning and engineering perspective, the current bridge has long been a point of concern in the overall St. Mary rehabilitation effort. In addition to being inadequate to handle all the construction equipment and materials needed to rehabilitate the canal, the current bridge is the weak link in the overall St. Mary's system. Engineers have been concerned that a structural failure would likely result in a

catastrophic collapse of the twin siphon barrels taking the whole St. Mary system off line for an indefinite period of time. The replacement bridge will completely separate vehicle traffic on the county road from the siphons. The new roadbed will be supported by 120 ft. long pre-stressed concrete beams anchored

at each end and supported by a single 6 ft. diameter pier placed in the center of the river.

Federal funding for the new bridge was requested by the Lt. Governor's Office and the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group in 2004. Senator Max

Baucus secured funding through the 2005 Federal Transportation Bill. Glacier County matched the federal funds through a State grant provided by the Treasure State Endowment Program. Total construction cost is estimated to be approximately \$2 million of which eighty-seven percent will be covered by federal transportation dollars.

By securing federal funding for the bridge early in the process, Senator Baucus has done a huge favor to all those who rely on water deliveries through the St. Mary Canal. The new bridge removes that threat of a bridge collapse taking the system down, it will provide a secure transportation link to move

equipment and materials across the river, improve local access, and by funding the project with federal transportation dollars the Senator has removed an additional financial burden from water uses in the Milk River Basin.



Montana Senator Max Baucus led off the St. Mary Bridge dedication ceremony on the Blackfeet Reservation. Standing behind Senator Baucus are Lt Governor John Bohlinger (right) and MDOT Director Jim Lynch (left) who also participated in the event.



Construction of temporary work bridge at site of new St. Mary River bridge.

Overall design and building of the bridge is being overseen by the MT Dept of Transportation. Great West Engineering of Helena is the design engineer with TD&H of Great Falls subcontracted for the surveying and geotechnical work. Sletten Construction of Great Falls is responsible for construction work.

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The St. Mary Rehabilitation: Mission Possible



Larry Mires - St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group Executive Director

The Milk River Project is approaching a century of service and it shows! On occasion, components of the Project have seen facelifts of varying degree, and halfhearted investigations on ways to improve the project facilities have been explored. In the last five years, we have seen anything but dabbling as intensive efforts to rehabilitate St. Mary's has taken hold with teeth that won't let go.

Yes, it has already been five years since the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group (SMRWG) formed! Together, we have shared and suffered through growing pains, frustrations, setbacks and hard work, but not without successes, which has made for a rewarding and worthwhile ride. New relationships have been built through frank and open discussions, paving the way for new understandings. The result: New ideas regarding rivers that we all share in common are being forged. We are building substantial bridges, figuratively and literally. Given the diversity of the 16-member SMRWG, the accomplishments are laudable, so let's revisit some of those successes.

The 2005 Montana Legislature handed the SMRWG its first of several major successes by appropriating \$10 million in bonding authority to be used as a match against federal dollars specifically for construction. This landmark move by the State of Montana set precedence in dealing with aging and failing federal water projects, which has been a hot topic at water conferences across the West. SMRWG names and faces are known throughout the west and in Washington DC, thanks in part to our affiliations with the Family Farm Alliance and the National Water Resources Association. The SMRWG has been a significant player in putting the issue of aging infrastructure on the national radar screen.

Last year The SMRWG achieved another major success. Thanks to Senator Max Baucus, Senator Jon Tester and Congressman Denny Rehberg, the rehabilitation was formally authorized in the Water Resource Development Act of 2007 (WRDA). Section 5103 of the WRDA authorizes the Army Corps of Engineers (COE), in consultation with Reclamation, \$153 million to rehabilitate the St. Mary Division of the Milk River Project.

The first shovel of dirt was formally turned on July 18, 2008 at a groundbreaking ceremony held in dedication of the new bridge going across the St. Mary River. This bridge is a major precondition for any significant construction to take place. Again, thanks goes out to U.S. Senator Baucus for securing the federal dollars that will cover the lion's share of the cost to build a new bridge (See Bridge Article).

Where do we go from here? We, meaning the SMRWG and its supporters, have a lot of unfinished business; our successes are something to build on, not dwell on. As stated, the authorization of the rehabilitation was a major success, but it is a long way from actualization. Congress has authorized \$153 million, but has not appropriated it. Perseverance and broad support have been the formula for our successes; therefore, I have no doubt that securing appropriations will be added to the growing list of achievements.

Emerging ideas aimed at guaranteeing a self-sustainable and agile Milk River Project are being developed. The SMRWG is working closely with the Milk River Joint Board of Control, state legislators, towns, reservations and county governments potentially establishing a basin entity that ensures self-reliance and a prosperous future for the Milk River Project and its beneficiaries.

The State of Montana has recently entered into talks with Alberta, and has recently reached a settlement with the Blackfeet Tribe on the Milk and St. Mary River waters. These are just two of many compelling examples of what the future holds and why rehabilitating St. Mary's is necessary if future needs are to be met. The fruit of these reconciliations will undoubtedly influence the rehabilitation's character.

Meeting the needs of the future means building flexibility into the Project. The challenges faced today could not have been imagined by the original designers; we have milked (pun intended) it for all its worth. The 19th Century technology greatly limits our ability to address current and future challenges. We must keep in mind as we move forward, that nothing is static.

The SMRWG will continue to make great strides. What was said by some to be "impossible" is slowly but surely becoming a reality. These successes would indeed be impossible without the incredible support of all the communities throughout the basin. Special thanks goes out to the Offices of the Governor and Lt. Governor, the Montana Legislature, our U. S. congressional delegation, and stakeholders that have stepped up to help the SMRWG solve this daunting dilemma.

We will succeed because we believe in our future. Never underestimate or doubt the tenacity of a Hi-Liner!

For a meeting agenda and additional information, visit the Working Group website at www.dnrc.state.mt.us/stmarycover.htm or contact

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email smrwg@nemontel.net or

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Update on the MRWA

(Milk River Watershed Alliance)

Christine Muller - MRWA Coordinator

THE MRWA HAS A WEBSITE!!!!

You can find information about the MRWA, subcommittees, partners, projects, and upcoming events at Milkriverwatershedalliance.com. This website is still under construction so check often for updated information. Contact information is available for members of the MRWA and we encourage you to email us with any questions or issues you have along the Milk River.



The MRWA ran a Milk River Watershed Alliance logo contest and

we are happy to report that the winner is Laura McCann from Harlem, Montana. Laura has an amazing artistic talent and we are very pleased with her efforts and the finished product.



or February of 2009. This is in the beginning planning stage and more information will be provided on our website as we move forward putting together this event.

If you have any questions, please contact the MRWA Coordinator, Christine Muller at 406-372-3131 – jacamuller@mtintouch.net or visit us

at our new website:
milkriverwatershedalliance.com

The MRWA is planning its first annual general meeting in January

Water Rights Compacts

The State is continuing to work closely with both the Blackfeet and Ft. Belknap Tribes and Montana's congressional delegation to ready legislation for introduction in Congress to ratify both the Blackfeet and the Ft. Belknap water rights settlements. The current hope is to have one or both of these settlement bills introduced this year if Congress holds a post-election lame duck session. Otherwise, the goal will be to have the bills ready to go at the federal level in early 2009. It will be a challenging task to get from having a bill introduced to having it enacted by Congress and signed by the President, but introduction is a critical first step in that process. The Reserved Water Rights Compact Commission (RWRCC) also intends to seek ratification of the Blackfeet Water Rights Compact by introducing it to the 2009 Montana Legislature. (The Ft. Belknap Compact was ratified by the Montana Legislature in 2001).

The RWRCC continues to closely track the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge's Comprehensive

Conservation Plan (CCP) process, which is intended to lay out the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's management vision for the Refuge for the next decade. At the conclusion of the CCP process, the RWRCC hopes to be able to conclude the Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) that is an essential prerequisite for the USFWS to exercise the water rights for Bowdoin that were quantified in that Compact (which the Montana Legislature ratified in 2007).

CALENDAR EVENTS

MRWA annual meeting to be announced in late January or early February. Check MRWA website at:
milkriverwatershedalliance.com

LINKS

USGS Water Watch Montana real-time streamflow:
<http://water.usgs.gov/waterwatch/?m=real&r=mt>

DNRC Water Resources Division: <http://dnrc.mt.gov/wrd>

Representatives on the Milk River JBC:

Kay Blatter	Chairman
Don Green	Vice-Chairman
Wade Jones	Secretary
Lee Cornwell	Member
Wes Pankratz	Member
Ralph Snider	Member
Brad Tilleman	Member
Jeff Warburton	Member
Joe Brummer	Member
Joe Nicholson	Member
Jennifer Brandon	Project Manager

Fort Belknap Irr. Dist.
Malta Irr. Dist.
Malta Irr. Dist.
Glasgow Irr. Dist.
Glasgow Irr. Dist.
Harlem Irr. Dist.
Zurich Irr. Dist.
Paradise Valley Irr. Dist.
Alfalfa Valley Irr. Dist.
Dodson Irr. Dist.



Milk River Water Supply

Chuck Heinje - Bureau of Reclamation

October 1, 2008

The water supply conditions in the Milk River basin during 2008 were overall very good. The total storage for the Milk River Project finished the water year at 156 percent of average. Storage for Lake Sherburne, Fresno and Nelson Reservoirs are 421, 144 and 112 percent average, respectively. The March through August inflows for each reservoir were 110, 94 and 95 percent of average, respectively.

Canal diversions as well as releases from Lake Sherburne were reduced beginning the week of September 8 and all diversions were discontinued on September 13. The total water diverted from the St. Mary basin to the Milk River during 2008 was approximately 178,600 acre-feet (115 % of average).

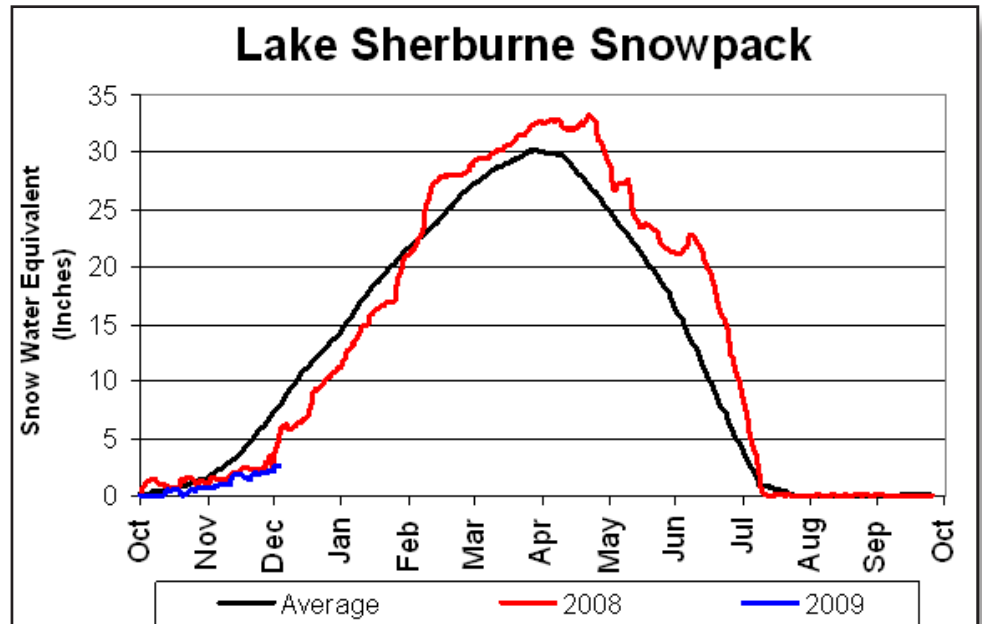
Maintenance work on the outlet works of Sherburne Dam has been completed. Work on Drop 2 and Drop 3 is in the final stages.

On October 1 releases from Fresno were reduced and are being maintained at the winter rate of approximately 46 cfs.

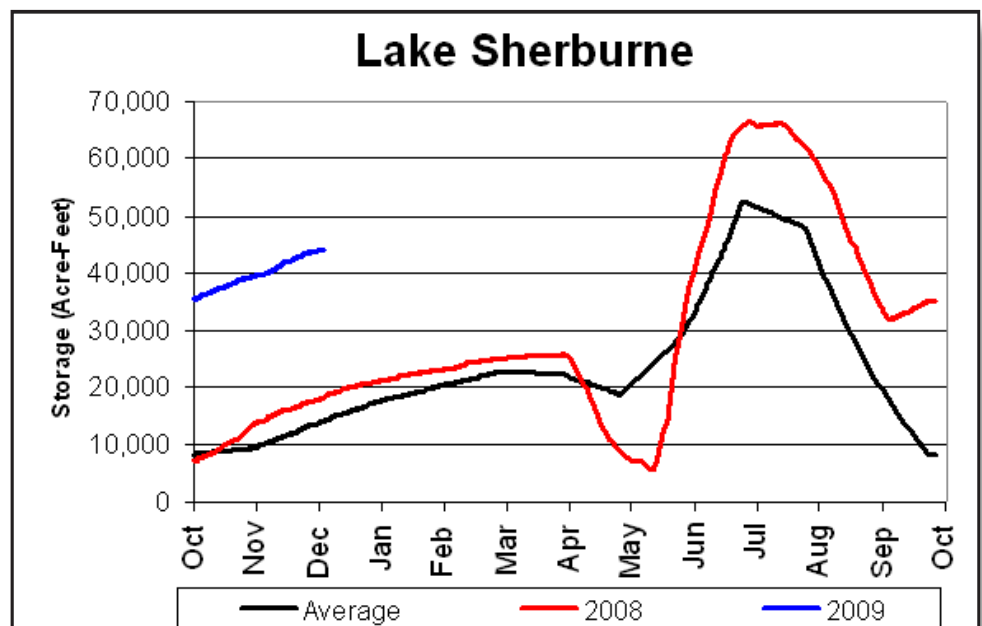
Storage in the Milk River Basin is currently sitting at 161.3 kaf, 146 percent of average, and 68 percent full as of December 1. Storage for Lake Sherburne, Fresno and Nelson Reservoirs are 322, 146 and 105 percent average, respectively. The November inflows for Lake Sherburne and Fresno reservoir were 78, and 146 percent of average, respectively.

Jeremy Giovando has accepted a new position with the Army Corps of Engineers in Walla Walla, WA, and reported to that position the end of September.

Storage as of December 1, 2008			
Reservoir	Storage (acre-feet)	% Normal	% Full
Lake Sherburne	43,800	322	66
Fresno	56,400	145	61
Nelson (active)	61,100	105	77



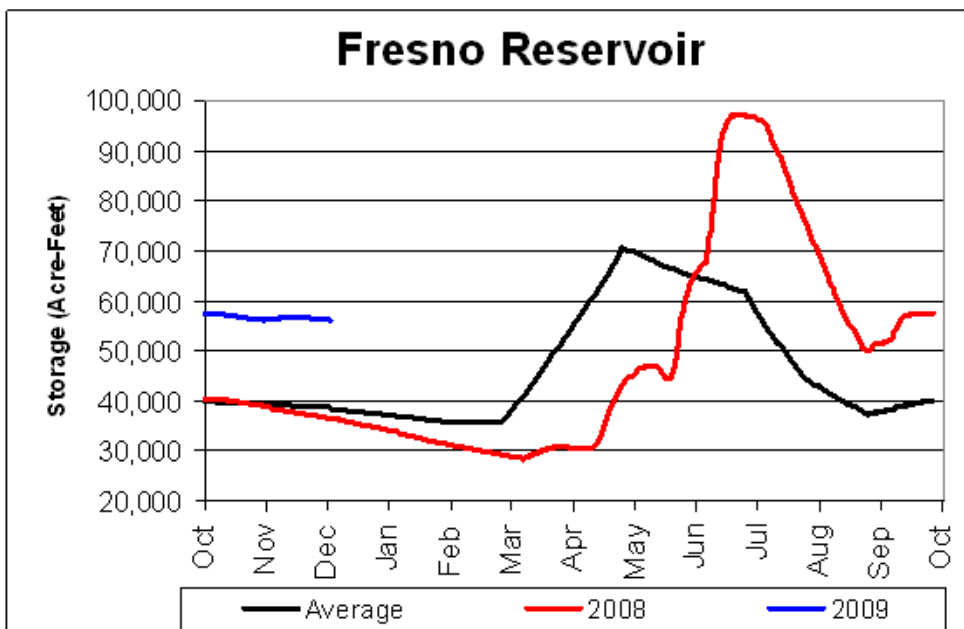
Lake Sherburne Snowpack



Lake Sherburne Storage

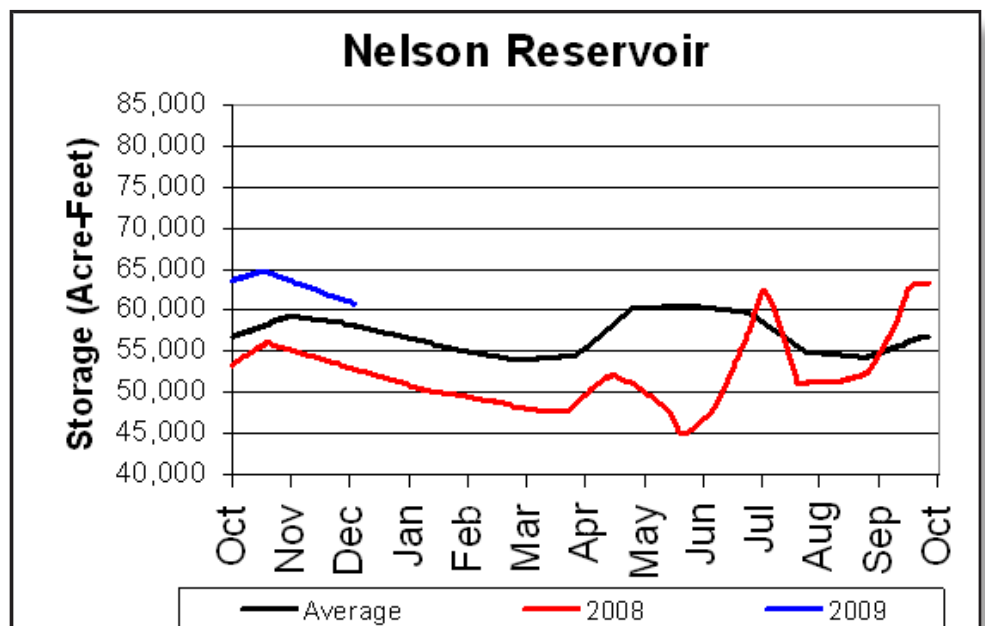


Sherburne Reservoir in the winter



Fresno Reservoir Storage

Nelson Reservoir Storage



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To sign up and receive the electronic version of the newsletter by email go to:

http://dnrc.mt.gov/st_mary/news/MilkRiverNewsSubscribe.asp

or view it online at the DNRC Water Resources website:

http://dnrc.mt.gov/wrd/forms_publications/newsletters.asp



Standing next to historic Vandalia Dam, Lt. Governor Bohlinger listens to Steve Stebelton, Glasgow Irrigation District Manager, describe the operational and structural problems with Vandalia Dam. Vandalia Dam and the Page Ranch were stops on a tour designed to emphasize the economic importance of the Milk River Irrigation Project to the region. Approximately 30 people attended the tour including local business leaders, area farmers and ranchers, state and local officials, and interested community members.

Photo Credit: Samar Faye, Editor, Glasgow Courier.

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